

Sun-Earth Day Special: Arctic Impressions Barrow, Alaska: Journal for Day 3 (1-22-08)

[Dorian Janney]

Greetings from the Top of the World! It is now Day 3 of my wonderful Alaskan adventure, and I am ready to see what today brings. The weather report says we will have warmer temperatures, a high of 27 and a low of -2, but we have blizzard conditions off and on throughout the day. Apparently, as this is actually a desert- another big surprise for me- they actually don't get very much snow here.

As everything is covered in snow, that is hard to believe that they don't get much snow, but I guess that is because it never melts so it seems as though they get a lot of snow.



I have now moved into a place known as the Narl Hotel, which is actually an old building that was built way back in the early 1970's for the oil workers. It had been out in Prudhoe Bay, and was moved out here for arctic scientists to use. The rooms are very small and not very fancy, but it is just fine. I am sharing a room with Elaine Lewis, a NASA educational specialist. We have one really funky bathroom for all the women, with only old shower curtains as doors between the toilets. Like I said, it isn't anything fancy, but the water is hot and there are wash clothes, and I am very content.

Today Elaine and I spent the day at the high school here in town, teaching students about solar storms. To get there, we had to drive in a four-wheel drive truck in the blinding snow. Back home in Maryland, they definitely would have canceled school in that weather! Although the school doesn't look that impressive from the outside, it was really nice inside. There were huge five foot icicles hanging off of some of the windows, which looked really cool- literally.





Elaine and I taught four block-schedule classes, and the students were very well-behaved and interested in our presentation. Our topic was “Space Weather”, and while all of them had seen the aurora ever since they were tiny, very few of them knew what caused these brilliant light shows in the winter evening skies. Many of them were surprised that we don’t see auroras in Rockville. They explained to us what the aurora looked

like, and said that after seeing them almost every night in the winter, they really didn’t pay much attention to them anymore.

First we taught them about the sun, and explained the process of how the sun creates energy that may become solar flares or coronal mass ejections, and these are what ultimately cause aurora to occur simultaneously at both the North and South Polar regions.



Elaine and I stayed all day, having lunch with the students and teacher in their cafeteria, and staying after school to chat for awhile with the teacher and her husband and daughter. By the time we left at 4 pm, it was already pitch black outside.

There are only about 250 high school students, and they really seem to get along very well. Because it is such an isolated community here in Barrow, as there are no roads in or out, everyone knows each other very well. Many of the teachers have lived in Barrow most of their lives. Mrs. Rosebery, the science teacher whose classes we worked in, is married to another teacher at



the high school, and their three children go to the school. As a matter of fact, her daughter was in her first period class! Imagine what it would be like having your mother be your science teacher! The teachers also know every parent, which makes it a little easier to establish a sense of community at the school. They have many sports teams. As a matter of fact the basketball teams were playing this Friday night and the girls basketball team was traveling by charter plane to a school to play and the boys basketball team was flying to another school via chartered plane. Instead of taking a school bus, they fly on planes to go and play at other schools.



They have many sports teams, a beautiful gym, and an indoor pool and ice hockey rink right across the street.

After we returned to our “home”, the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium (BASC), we talked about our plans for interviewing people for our upcoming podcasts and I worked on fixing up these pictures to put in my photo diary. Our conference officially begins tomorrow, and

already scientists from around the world have begun to arrive. It should be pretty exciting!

Tomorrow will be the first time that the sun has risen here in Barrow since sometime last fall, so it is a pretty special day. It is supposed to come up around 1:06 pm, and then set only an hour later. It does get pretty light during the middle of the day here, but you don't ever actually see the sun as it remains below the horizon.

Well that's all for now, signing off, this is Ms. Janney.